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ABSTRACT

As a source of trained workers, postsecondary schools need to develop a curriculum that encourages critical thinking and provide an environment that helps students to understand the changing economy. The curriculum should be based on the student's experiences and interests and should prepare one for life situations. In the business curriculum, three developmental curriculum models are used to analyze job requirements in a specific work context so educational programs can be developed to prepare future employees. The skills component model describes job duties, tasks, skills, and broad competencies. The professional model takes a holistic approach and looks at understanding job requirements in specific work settings or social contexts. The general components model differs from the first two in that it extends beyond the requirements of a single job category or occupational group, and broad job requirements are used for developing a curriculum necessary for all students and for many different jobs. Community colleges' response to employers' complaints about the work readiness of those they hire has been to integrate content into occupational programs so graduates will have basic reading, writing, and mathematical skills, as well as some of the higher-order or problem solving skills demanded by the business community. Another part of the curriculum that prepares graduates for the workplace is work-based learning experiences, such as internships or cooperative education. (Contains 15 references.) (YLB)

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Business Curriculum Development in the Community College

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In a 1992 study of "Non-Liberal Arts Curriculum Study" at 164 community colleges 43.3% of spring 1991 community college curriculum was devoted to the non-liberal arts. In a group of 10 course categories 24.6% of all courses were business and office focused (Cohen & Ignash, 1992). The community college curriculum may be generally classified as career, developmental, community and collegiate studies. This article will deal specifically to and overview of the business curriculum.

As workers prepare for entry or reentry into the workplace they require an educational program that provides higher order thinking, problem solving, cooperative work skills in addition to technical job skills. After spending over twenty years in the business field as part of an administrative staff, supervision and management I've been interested in understanding the nature of a business curriculum in higher education and its relationship to the actual practical knowledge needed in the workplace.

As I wrote an article entitled, *Workforce Performance-A pragmatic view*, I encountered research that continually pointed to postsecondary schools as a source of trained workers, including graduates of both vocational and general education programs. (Hirshberg, 1991). Schools at this level need to develop a curriculum that encourages critical thinking and provide an environment to understand the changing economy. The school as discussed by Ornstein & Hunkins (1998) should be seen as a specialized environment that coincides with the social environment. The curriculum should be based on the student's experiences and interests and ultimately prepares one for life situations.

Job Analysis Models

In the business curriculum there are different approaches that are used to analyze job requirements in a specific work context so that educational programs can be

developed to prepare future employees. Three developmental curriculum models are: the skills component model, the professional model and the general components model.

The skills component model describes job duties, tasks, skills and broad competencies (Bailey & Merrit, 1995). The skill standards movement emerged from a belief that technology and market changes have caused significant modifications in the types of skills and behaviors needed by workers on-the-job. This belief motivated a broad education reform movement that involved changes in curriculum and pedagogy and sought to tie education more closely to the emerging needs of the workplace. "Industry-based skill standards are believed to be a crucial component of that movement. Advocates not only argue that skill standards will strengthen the educational system but that they will also become a critical part of reform efforts in the workplace. Working together, educators and employers will get a chance to reexamine not only their relationships with each other, but activities within their own institutions. As a result of the growing conviction that skill standards can make a significant contribution to improving both education and work, the 1994 Goals 2000: Educate America Act established a National Skill Standards Board to promote the development of a national system of voluntary industry-based skill standards. Even earlier, starting in 1992, the U.S. Departments of Labor and Education established twenty-two pilot projects to help lay the groundwork for a national system" (Bailey & Merritt, 1995). Tools that may be used for carrying out this type of model are DACUM (Develop A Curriculum), FJA (Functional Job Analysis, the Delphi technique (Custer, Scarcella & Stewart, 1998) and V-TECS (Vocational-Technical Consortium of States). According to Bailey and Merritt (1995) the work

activities are broken into component parts, which fragments the job and causes the instructional material to be highly task oriented.

Another job analysis procedure is the professional model, which takes on a holistic approach and looks at understanding job requirements in specific work settings or social contexts (Stitt-Gohdes, Lambrecht & Redmann, 2000). This model identifies job competencies for employment preparation; however, general skills such as planning and problem solving are included. It also relates to understanding the role of workers in innovative workplaces, sometimes referred to as high-performance workplaces (Bailey & Merritt, 1995). There are skill certification areas for professional workers such as nurses, doctors, lawyers, accountants, architects, engineers and other certifying capabilities needed to carry out the activities of their occupations (Bailey & Merritt, 1995).

The third model differs from the first two in that it extends beyond the requirements of a single job category or occupational group. Broad job requirements are used for developing a curriculum necessary for all students and for many different jobs. This approach focuses on the generic skills or traits needed by individuals and may not necessarily include the tasks (Ally, 1999). Because of the dynamic nature and continual increase in the use of computing technology in business and industry, job competencies are viewed more broadly. This broad approach describes general competencies. It may compliment task analysis information in attempting to extend information to broad job categories in similar settings.

Integration of Academic Skills

Employers have been criticizing the work readiness of those they hire, complaining that many graduates of post secondary schools do not possess the basic

educational skills needed to learn on the job (Badway & Grubb, 1997). One of the ways in which community colleges have responded to this complaint has been to integrate content into occupational programs so that graduates will have both the basic reading, writing, and mathematical skills as well as some of the higher order or problem solving skills demanded by the business community (Foote, 1999).

Efforts have been made in modules and courses that address some of the requests made by industry and today's changing workplace and social demands (Badway & Grubb, 1997). Students that lack adequate competency in reading, composition and math are assessed and placed in the appropriate level of academic courses. They are usually noncredit courses in the curriculum and structured to build progressively the skills necessary for successful academic and occupational study (Badway & Grubb, 1997).

About half of the 18 to 36 general education credits required for an Associate degree are divided among reading, writing, mathematics and science. The other half consists of humanities, social and political science history and fine arts. The second half is intended to impart citizenship, cultural appreciation and ethics, as well as critical and analytic thinking.

Work-Based Learning

Another part of the curriculum that prepares a graduate for the workplace is work-based learning experiences such as internships or cooperative education. In many instances this part of the curriculum may not be a requirement to graduate (Grubb & Badway, 1997). This area becomes an example of where the community college must work with businesses in the community. It becomes an opportunity to turn theory of knowledge learned to actual real life experience.

It is important to keep in mind that two-year colleges play an important role in providing millions of students with education and training needed for success in today's economy. While some of the students may be the traditional learner a number of the students consist of those going through a retraining and upgrading of skills for older workers and providing basic education for adults (Dougherty & Bakia, 2000). Success of these students depends on the close links between institution, faculty and the labor market in terms of the programs offered, content of the programs and finally placement of students into jobs. When developing these curriculums students of all ages must be considered and how these graduates will be able to enter or reenter into the labor market.

Local businesses therefore become important resources in program and curriculum development. Connections continue to grow through apprenticeships, co-op programs, work-based learning and contract education, which emphasizes classroom theory to applied experience in local business, government, or nonprofit settings (Brewer & Gray, 1997). Again, it is important to keep in mind that this part of the curriculum may not be a requirement for graduation as other core parts of a program. Further a study by Brewer & Gray (1997) shows that when the local economy is weak the colleges have a difficult time building connections with the labor market because employers are not doing much recruiting and have very little motivation to interact with the college. "In addition, the employers have less money to contract with colleges for training programs and courses; they have less time to spare for activities such as advisory committee meetings; and they turn over equipment less often, leaving the college with less opportunity to obtain "hand-me-down" equipment for certain programs" (Brewer & Gray, 1997).

Conclusion

Whether a community or state has a competitive advantage depends on the skills of their workforce. The development of the business curriculum must continuously be reviewed, discussed and reflected upon by all concerned; namely, the business community, administration, faculty and students. This will insure that the latest trends become part of the programs in order to prepare people for global business and economics.

Community colleges in particular, will continue to have the prime function of training and retraining workers for this ever-changing 21st century workplace. There will continually be demands for a more educated and skilled workforce and the community college graduate must be ready to enter this lifelong learning environment (Ovel, 2000; Grubb, Badway, Bell, Bragg, & Russman, 1997; & Thomas & Wagner, 2000).

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